

Faith on the Road **Luke 24:13-35**

Life Journey Changes...

I believe that many of you have already started planning for your summer. This summer, I am planning to visit Korea. I have not been to Korea for 13 years so I bet Korea in general, as well as my hometown have changed a lot. When I talked with my friend over the phone, he told me, "Be careful. You will probably get lost here." So I will bring my GPS with me all the time so that I can find my way back home here to my Asbury family! As my time living in the United States has gotten longer, sometimes, I feel like my home is here and visiting Korea is more like a vacation trip. I never expected that I would feel this way, but I do now. Korea must have changed a lot, but my life's journey has also changed me as well. I am not exactly the same person as I was when I left Korea 15 years ago. Life's journey often takes us on unexpected paths and we are changed through life on the road. Things we saw, things we experienced, circumstances we've been through and most importantly, people we have met on the road have changed us.

Two disciples on the Road

In today's scripture reading, we meet two disciples who were on the road. They were heading to a village called Emmaus from Jerusalem. We don't know why they walked to Emmaus but they might have been fleeing from potential persecution and been on their way back to their hometown. Their teacher, Jesus, was crucified and they saw him dying on the cross a few days earlier. His teaching was so powerful and moving that they joined Jesus' pack and traveled with him to Jerusalem. On their journey with Jesus, they saw Jesus healing the sick, casting out evil spirits and even raising the dead. They experienced the joy of sitting with those who were called sinners and learned that they also were beloved children of God. They hoped that he was the one who would redeem Israel. Their journey with Jesus had changed them.

But once again, life's journey took them on an unexpected path. Their beloved teacher had been killed and now, the Jews might be looking for their next prey. So they hurried on their way out of the city even though they heard from some women that Jesus is alive. They fled from the past but they could not simply go back to the old life because the journey with Jesus had changed them. They were in an in-between place, a space between the reality of death and the reality of resurrection.

I believe we often find ourselves in the position of these two disciples. During the week, Juhee and I have talked a lot about how we can proclaim the living hope in the risen Christ in a tangible way. We agreed that it's a difficult task for two reasons. It's difficult because first, the reality of death is so real and second, people are so familiar with this resurrection story.

With grateful hearts, we celebrated Easter and the risen Christ two weeks ago. But we also feel that nothing seems to have changed. Last Sunday, we had many prayer concerns for those who had lost loved ones. Many of us are still struggling with health issues and live under the burden of pain and suffering. We are living in an in-between place, between the reality of death and the reality of the resurrection. Honestly, the power of death seems more real than the power of the resurrection. So when we hear about the Easter story, we know it's a good story but we may feel that it has nothing to do with our present life.

Another reason why proclaiming the living hope in the risen Christ is difficult is that we know about this story too well. How many of you have read the same novel over and over again and are deeply touched by it every time? My favorite novel is "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho. I read it three times but no more because I know the basic plot and little twists of the story and the conclusion so I am not so moved by the book as when I first read it. Similarly, we have heard the Easter story many times. You know the theme of Easter and can guess what the preacher is going to preach on Easter. Right? We all know the amazing story of Easter and we get used to it, so that we may not experience the life-changing power of the risen Christ. That is why we generally have a Low Sunday after the high Sunday of Easter. Simply knowing the Easter story is not enough. Yes. We need to know about it and deeply understand it. But we need something more than knowledge about Easter. We have to be enlightened by this Easter story and this story has to be our story. Otherwise, our joy of Easter will soon be muted by the reality of death we face every day. So I want you to honestly think of these questions. "Is the

resurrection of Jesus Christ real to you? If yes, How? If not, why?" We need to awaken to the reality of the resurrection.

Spiritual Awakening

The two disciples knew about the resurrection since Jesus taught them that he must suffer and die and be raised again. They even heard Mary Magdalene's witness, "I have seen the Lord!" They heard about it. They knew about it. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not real for them because the reality of death was so vivid and real. Their attention was caught up in the reality of death so they didn't even recognize when Jesus came near them. The Good news is that the risen Christ came to them, met them on the road again and awakened them.

When the disciples didn't understand what happened in Jerusalem, Jesus said, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures." As Jesus broke the bread and gave it to them, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him!" They were awakened to the resurrection reality by the risen Christ.

I think this biblical scripture shows us the process of Christian spiritual awakening. What we need today is a spiritual awakening to the reality of resurrection. Originally, awakening means that you awake from a dream. Think of when you have had a bad dream. I normally get a good night's sleep, so I don't often dream or don't remember dream, but a few days ago, I had a bad dream. In the dream, Juhee and I were separated from one another and I had to look for her in a dark forest while being chased by some people. My dog, Joy, was with me and somehow he ran into the woods. I don't remember the details but in the dream, the feeling of anxiety and tension were very real to me. Luckily, I woke up to the sound of Joy hopping up the stairs and running to my bed to lick my face. When I was awake, I realized what was really real and I was glad. Generally speaking, a spiritual awakening is "a newfound awareness of a spiritual reality." We know that the risen Christ is with us all the time but often don't feel it because of the reality of suffering and death we experience. A spiritual awakening means that despite our experience of human finitude and suffering, we realize that Christ is still with us. The spiritual awareness of the risen Christ helps us see the situation we are in differently and give us hope in all circumstances.

Faith as visio

When we hear "Spiritual," we tend to think of something supernatural. But there are varieties of spiritual experience. David B. Yaden, categorized spiritual experiences into six categories as you can see on the screen. [ppt] You can experience spiritual reality in an art museum or at the Grand Canyon. You can feel the presence of God during the worship service as well as while gardening. What we need is faith in the risen Christ. One dimension of faith is Visio, a way of seeing reality. According to theologian Marcus Borg, Faith as *visio* is "a different way of seeing reality, seeing God's grace at work in the world." Faith helps us to see the resurrection reality even in the reality of suffering and death. Faith helps us to be mindful of and see the presence of God.

We have heard about the risen Christ and we know about it. Now, following the lead of the risen Christ, we need to be awakened to the reality of resurrection. This spiritual awakening is happening around us. Some of you have already heard about the "2023 Asbury Revival." Our church will invite Asbury students and will hear about this revival at Asbury University in May. So don't miss the opportunity. My beloved Asbury family. Christ has risen and he is still with us. Let us stay awake to the risen Christ.

I would like to close my sermon with singing "He Lives." (UMH 310) Please rise and with joyful voices, let us praise our risen Christ. Amen.